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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ALMATY 000629

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TAGS: [ECONOMIC](#)

SUBJECT: A/S HARTY VISIT TO ALMATY: TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS

1. SUMMARY. Assistant Secretary Maura Harty's visit to Kazakhstan served to underscore the importance of consular work to our multi-faceted bilateral relationship. In a series of high-profile events, A/S Harty discussed our consular commitment to the business community, the variety of education options available to Kazakhstani students in the United States, and, in a well-attended and highly covered press conference, adoption and visa issues. Later in the visit, A/S Harty met with entry-level officers and with consular officers stationed in Almaty and Astana. A rough translation of media coverage will be sent via email. END SUMMARY.

A/S Harty to AmCham: America is Open for Business

2. During a well-attended morning breakfast address to the American Chamber of Commerce of Kazakhstan on February 6, A/S Harty reviewed the post-September 11 history of the visa issuance process and its effect on the international business community. Her message to the local community: the Department of State has never been in a better position to respond to business visa requests and to facilitate business travel. A/S Harty also noted Embassy Almaty's Business Facilitation Program and the comparatively low refusal rates for Kazakhstani B-1 visa applicants.

3. During a question and answer session following her address, A/S Harty responded to queries on tourist travel visa issuance rates, the ability of non-profit organizations to obtain visas, profiling of Central Asian applicants, and the advisability of business travelers to invite their families with them on business trips to the United States. As a follow-up, Consular Section officers met with local members of the Almaty Tourism Board to address issues relating to tourist travel to the United States.

Press Roundtable: Squaring the Adoption Issue

4. In a spirited session with a large contingent of national and local print and electronic media, A/S Harty fielded a number of questions on the adoption of Kazakhstani children. A/S Harty reviewed the adoption process in Kazakhstan and described children as "our most important asset." The media focused their questions on child kidnapping issues, the difference between adoption and abduction, the role of an embassy in the adoption process, and the responsibility of caregivers, teachers, and police in the U.S. to verify the safety of adopted children.

Speech to Students: "Come Study in the U.S.A."

5. In a lively exchange with students at a local university, A/S Harty discussed the many opportunities available to Kazakhstanis interested in higher education in the United States. Many of the questions revolved around financing for higher education in the United States, and A/S Harty invited students to consult with the embassy's student advising center on the many scholarship opportunities available to international students. Students also asked about documentation needed when applying for a student visa, immigration issues, and the student visa refusal rates at Embassy Almaty (currently around 10 percent.).

Meeting "The Troops": Time with ELO and CON Officers

6. Throughout her visit, A/S Harty met with groups of entry level and consular officers to discuss "the view from Washington." A/S Harty spent time with consular officers from both Almaty and Astana to underscore the Department's commitment to their career development and professional growth. At a session at the CMR hosted by Ambassador and Mrs. Ordway, A/S Harty spoke to ELOs. In a discussion on a

wide range of topics, A/S Harty stressed the importance of leadership at all levels of the Foreign Service. She often illustrated her comments with practical and frequently humorous, anecdotes from her own career

Comment

17. A/S Harty's visit to Kazakhstan could not have come at a more timely moment. In recent weeks, Kazakhstani media have focused on the U.S. investigation of California based Yunona adoption agency. In response to questions on this issue as well as other adoption-related subjects, A/S Harty provided straightforward answers on safeguards in place that the Bureau of Consular Affairs and U.S. Embassies employ in working with both adoption agencies and prospective parents. Media reporting of her session was uniformly positive and served to reinforce the embassy's core message on the importance of assisting Kazakhstani orphans. END COMMENT.
Ordway